

CAPITAL GUARDIAN

Volume 2, Issue 1
Summer 2005

Operation Northern Thunder

PUBLISHED IN THE INTEREST OF JOINT FORCE HEADQUARTERS, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Volume 2, Issue 1

June 2005



Published in the interest of the men and women of the Joint Force Headquarters, District of Columbia.



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The Capital Guardian is published by the Public Affairs Office, Joint Force Headquarters, District of Columbia, 2001 East Capitol Street, Washington, DC 20003-1719
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The Capital Guardian is an unofficial publication authorized under the provisions of AR-360-81 and AFI 35-101. Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily endorsed by the Department of Defense. The Capital Guardian is distributed free to District of Columbia National Guard members and to other interested persons upon request.

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Today's New Normal

by Maj. Gen. David F. Wherley, Jr.
Commander, DC National Guard

With the War on Terrorism entering a "new normal" phase of peacekeeping in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as increased attention to terrorist operations worldwide, it's time to address daily life in the DC National Guard.

First and foremost, our mission as "Capital Guardians" has never been more critical to our nation's defense both at home and abroad. The 121st Fighter Squadron will be engaged in the air sovereignty mission defending the Capital for the foreseeable future.

The DC National Guard will continue to prepare units for deployments worldwide. Additionally, our C-26 is currently operating in support of Joint Task Force Horn in Djibouti, South Africa. The 372nd Military Police Battalion continues to prepare for a possible overseas mission and both Army and Air Guard staffs are working together diligently for individuals and small groups for missions around the globe.

As we focus our attention to home, we seem to go from one National Security Special Event to another. Every Inauguration, State of the Union Address, state funeral, and memorial dedication establishes operational tempo for our troops "home game."

We have formed a full-time reaction force to increase our capability to respond quickly to emergencies within the National Capital Region and our newly formed 33rd Civil Support Team is undergoing a training and certification process which further enhances the state of emergency mission capabilities. In response to increased joint operations we have reorganized into a Joint Headquarters to better manage the forces brought to bear on events downtown.

As times change, we must adjust to meet the standards of the information technology industry. Therefore, we have remodeled our operations center into a 24/7 joint facility, and stepped up the tempo in coordination with federal, local, and surrounding states in order to share information and respond jointly to a crisis. Furthermore, we recently opened the newly



DC National Guard on Parade for Presidential Inauguration

by Maj. Sheldon Smith

DC National Guard Public Affairs Officer

Washington—The DC National Guard had an unprecedented role in the 55th Presidential Inauguration in January. While to the public, the more than 150-strong Army and Air marching element that passed the before President's reviewing stand was the most visible aspect of the Capital Guardians' inaugural support, there was much more happening behind the scenes.

Most people were unaware of the intense coordination that was taking place with local authorities and White House officials to ensure a well-coordinated and successful event.

A major portion of this coordination focused on security for the National Capital Region, and more than 7000 servicemembers were posted throughout the nation's capital to augment civil police authorities.

In addition, guardsmen from Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and New Jersey were prepared to augment the Quick Reaction Force under the umbrella of the Emergency Mutual Assistance Compact (EMAC).

The EMAC agreement, signed by National Guard leaders from several neighboring states, enables guardsmen to respond across jurisdictional lines to critical incidents within the National Capital Region. The EMAC agreement was used in the District of Columbia for the first time during the inauguration.



Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist administers the oath of office to President George W. Bush while First Lady Laura Bush and daughters Barbara and Jenna look on.



President George W. Bush, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard B. Myers and Vice President Richard B. Cheney render honors to the American flag as they observe the pass in review.

Military police and security forces from the DC National Guard were deputized as law enforcement officials for the event. Prior to and during the inauguration, there were hundreds of soldiers and airmen on standby in the event their services were needed, including a Quick Reaction Force (QRF), consisting of three platoons, two from the DC Air Guard and one from DC Army Guard standing by at the DC Armory.

"All in all, I think the soldiers did a superb job training and preparing to respond if needed," said Spec. Derrick Rich of the 547th Transportation Company.

The QRF was on call to assist the Metropolitan Police Department with any civil disturbance the might have occurred. Airmen from the 113th Wing, 201st Airlift Squadron, and the 231st Combat Communications Squadron formed the two Air Guard platoons. Army Guard soldiers assigned to the QRF were from 104th Maintenance Company and the 276th Military Police Company.

The QRF was sworn in by the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) in part because of the prospect of their involvement in civil law enforcement activities.

As a preliminary measure, all participating Capital Guardians were deputized at a ceremony the day prior to the inauguration. Capt. Regis Bryan, commander of the MPD Special Weapons and Tactics team, presided over the ceremony.

Rockville Salon Giving Back to Military Community

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Lorenzo Parnell

Rockville, Md.—Progressions Salon and Spa honored Washington area military families here by offering free salon services for family members.

The salon, which is locally owned and operated, worked in conjunction with the Family Readiness Center to provide free basic haircuts, facials and nail services for national capitol region military personnel and their families.

Stylists will be donating their time to give back to the local military community. “These men and women who have served diligently to protect our homeland and continue to fight the War on Terrorism deserve to be shown appreciation from the community,” said Ira Ludwick, owner of Progressions Salon and Spa.

“These are husbands, wives and children who kept hope alive at home and who have made the sacrifice of family togetherness, while their loved ones in our armed forces fight for freedom,” said Ludwick.

The spa, which opened in Rockville in 1984, is located at 12211 Nebel Street, Rockville, Md. 20852.



During the Progression Salon event, owner Ira Ludwick (r) gives client Ms. Lilly a word of encouragement before a hair stlye change.

Around the DC National Guard

St. Andrew—Cpt. Sandra Ford made her mark in history as the first member of the DC National Guard to graduate from the Caribbean Junior Command Staff Course in December.

She was not only the first DCNG member but the first female soldier from the JDF Training Depot, New Castle St. Andrew.

There was something else awaiting her upon graduation, CPT Ford entered the course as a first lieutenant, and upon graduation she was promoted to captain.

Ford is a Supply Systems Analyst at USPFO. She was welcomed by all attending the course and there was a high Jamaican media interest during her graduation ceremony.



The New Army uniform arrives at the DC Armory worn by State Command Sergeant Major Arthur Williamson. The uniform caused quite a stir and a lot of mixed opinions about its design. As SGM Williamson conducted business as usual through the DC Armory he was stopped and was asked various question concerning the uniform. Many asked when will the new uniforms will be ready for issue. Lt. Col. Flores listens tentatively as SGM Williamson explains the uniform wear and the new no polish boots.

Tennessee Youngster is Pilot for a Day

Story by Staff Sgt. Lorenzo Parnell

Washington—Six-yearold Will Leford of Cleveland, Tenn. became the DC Air National Guard's first Pilot for a day here at Andrews, AFB. "I promise to ask questions, smile, and have as much fun as military regulations will allow," Will said as the 201st Airlift Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Darrel Richards, administered a special Oath of Office. Then he was off for a day of learning and fun.

The Pilot for a Day program is sponsored by the DCANG and designed to bring hope and cheer to seriously ill children. The Washington Ronald McDonald House helped to find Will, who suffers from Muscular Dystrophy.

Ledford was the guest of honor at Andrews AFB for the entire day. He was accompanied by his mother Kim Ledford, sisters Brittany (15), Abby (9), and his grandparents John and Charlotte Dodson. Will and his family were in Washington for four days while he received clinical trail treatment at Children's National Hospital. Will visits the hospital once a month and each time they stay at the Ronald McDonald House.

"We have known for about 3 years that Will has Muscular Dystrophy. His dad and I made a conscious decision that he is going to live every day instead of dying every day," said Kim Ledford. "That's why today - Pilot for a Day - is so important and great program because this is a day we will remember forever and we know that Will is happy to be here," she said.

Capt. Susanne Schulz, Pilot for a Day Program Coordinator for the DCANG contacted the Ronald McDonald house to help select a

candidate for the program based on specific criteria. Bridgett Brenton, who works for the House Operations Department at Ronald McDonald House of Washington was pleased to help with the selection. Brenton said the criteria made it tough to choose because she had to select

children 6 to 8 years old both male and female and all of whom really deserved the chance for a day of special fun. "It just happened that Will was chosen because he had a lot of energy and met most of criteria we were looking for," said Brenton.

Tech. Sgt. Arthur Powell, Public Affairs NCOIC for the 113th Wing was on hand to assist with the program. According to

Powell, when it came to asking unit personnel to volunteer in support of the program the response was overwhelming. Every unit was more than willing to assist in any way they could.

"I think it's great that we put this together because it brings a chance for the DC Air National Guard to give back to the community and show some appreciation," said Powell.

"We have all these assets and we are so fortunate in our daily lives and the one thing that we can do is share it with Will and his family," Powell said.

During his Pilot for a Day tenure Will toured various location to give him a glimpse of what a pilot really does every day. Will and his family visited the F-16 Life Support Operations, F-16 Simulator, C-38 and C-40 display, Control Tower and Base Fire Department. Additionally, Will had a little surprise waiting for him — an F-16 fighter with his name painted on the outside of the aircraft. "I really like it and thank you for this Air Force thing," said Will.



Will Ledford gets help with his helmet prior to climbing into his F-16 trainer while serving as the first Pilot for a Day.



Will and Capt. Susanne Schultz watch from the window of a C-40 as Air Force One takes off from Andrews Air Force Base.

DC National Guard Armory Gets New Fitness Center

Photos and Story by Raynald Blackwell

Washington –The District of Columbia National Guard is demonstrating its continued commitment to fitness with the opening of the newly renovated Physical Fitness Center. The million-dollar facility is located in the north basement of the DC Armory. “The facility will provide members of the DC National Guard community with exactly what they need to start a healthy lifestyle. It’s safe to say the DC National Guard has moved into the current century of fitness,” said Fitness Center Director Raynald Blackwell. The facility is open to the entire Military District of Washington community it will particularly serve members of the District of Columbia National Guard and their families.

The facility features an aerobic/spin room with bikes, treadmills, cross trainers, a stretching area, free-weight and a cardio area with Life Fitness and Hammer Strength exercise equipment; it also includes a men’s and women’s locker room with individual showers.

The new facility will be offering group classes such as aerobics, spinning, yoga, cardio, kickboxing, and pilates at a nominal fee. Nationally certified instructors will conduct these classes. The hours of operation are Mon – Fri 5:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. For more information please contact Mr. Raynald A. Blackwell, 1SG (Ret), Physical Fitness Specialist at (202) 685-9641 or email: raynald.a.blackwell@dc.ngb.army.mil.



SPC Octavia Williamson, 74th Troop Command Legal Services NCO works out during opening day.

The following are the rules for using the new facility:

- No gym bags are allowed on exercise floors.
- Lockers are used only when utilizing the fitness center, they are not 24hr lockers.
- Sports drinks including water are to be kept in “closed” containers.
- You must bring your own towels, but Gym-Wipes are available to sanitize the gym equipment.
- Replace free weights and dumbbells after use.
- The use of personal headphones is required.

DC National Guard Supports Local Food Drive

Story and photos by Staff Sergeant Lorenzo Parnell

Washington–The Brentwood Avenue Giant supermarket, News Channel Fox 5, and WPGC 95.5 worked together to help expand the food supplies at the local food bank during the annual “Stuff a Truck” food drive. When it came to looking for volunteers the sponsors were running short and called on the DC National Guard for assistance.

Members of the DC Guard Food Services division answered the call and spent the afternoon loading groceries onto trucks bound for the food bank. Items included sodas, canned goods, dried peas and other non-perishable items.

“We really enjoyed our selves during the “Stuff A Truck” event especially getting to meet the WPGC personalities,” said Mira Rodriguez. “Volunteering in the community is one way to giving back to the District for supporting the DC National Guard.” she said.

Overall several trucks were loaded, a live gospel group provided entertainment, and WPGC was on location with live radio broadcasts. The DCNG “Capital Guardians” were featured on the local news as part of the community of volunteers supporting the food drive.



*Top row: Maj. Thomas Woody, Sgt. Deadra Long, Chris Paul of WPGC 95.5, Spc. Megan Jackson, Michel Wright of WPGC 95.5, Staff Sgt. Lorenzo Parnell, David Hanes
Bottom center: Pfc. Mira Rodriguez.*

DC National Guard Couples Retreat

By Staff Sgt. Lorenzo Parnell

Northeast MD—On a cold breezy Friday afternoon more than a dozen couples took a journey to Sandy Cove Resort here for the inaugural DC National Guard Couples Retreat.

The retreat, sponsored by Sandy Cove Resort and the DC National Guard Family Services, was organized to help couples focus on their relationship and specific concerns that arise when a family member is deployed.

The Sandy Cove Resort provided couples with hotel accommodations and meals, and the secluded atmosphere allowed couples to focus on each other and the information provided. The site, located on the Chesapeake Bay, has all the quiet time needed for couples to relax.

The retreat featured talks on how to deal with everyday life when challenges such as deployments, finances, children, and work-related issues occur.

“We were pleased to get the responses we received when we put out the e-mail for this couples retreat,” said Mrs. Connie Moore, Air National Guard Family Services Coordinator for the 113th Wing at Andrews AFB.

“We are glad you decided to participate, we want you to have fun and hope that you enjoy our topics and each other during your stay here at Sandy Cove,” said Moore.

Facilitators were on hand to assist the couples upon arrival, helping couples get checked in and providing information for the evenings activities.

“To set the atmosphere the resort has prepared a candlelight dinner for couples,” said Sgt. Maj. Patricia Williamson, State Family Service Coordinator.

“They have volunteered to participate and we at family services want them to have a life learning experience and enjoy themselves,” Williamson said.

After dinner couples went to a conference room for an icebreaker, to meet each other and the DCNG Family Service Team.

After the reception, participants received an overview of activities, and started discussions including recognizing danger signs and maintaining commitment in relationships. To conclude the evening, the couples went to their separate ways to spend quality time together.

The topics for the retreat were drawn from the



The Family Services team takes a moment to enjoy the scenic view and showcase the Sandy Cove Resort.

Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), which helps couples to find ways to deal with everyday life. Additionally, family readiness provided resources for the service member and their families to get assistance in financial budgeting, daycare, and healthcare benefits.

The facilitator Maj. Andrea Foster, Deputy State Chaplain, spoke on topics that tugged at the hearts of the couples attending. “It’s important for the service member to be physically fit but it is also just as important to be mentally and spiritually fit,” said Foster who went on to stress that when servicemembers are well cared for it benefits both families and the National Guard. According to Foster, Guardsmen having a strong family support team really make the difference during the time of deployment.

The retreat was designed to teach ways of having a great relationship and understanding ways to help confront conflict and those resolve issues. Many couples attending the group were very open about the experiences during difficult times like deployments. They shared ideas on how to handle stress and other ways to cope with family related problems.

“I enjoyed the time spent here with my wife we had good quality time together and it has been a positive experience,” said Tech. Sgt. Linwood Edwards. “I would like to come back and do it all over again. I really had a good time,” said Edwards.

Commanders Column

(continued from page 2)

renovated fitness center after much anticipation. We encourage all Guard members to utilize the center to their maximum potential.

We are improving our family services, communications and other key processes in order to create a more capable force. Recruiting and retention demand the best techniques and procedures to train effectively. We want to boost the morale for our patriotic mission. It is a tough recruiting environment and all must be ambassadors of the DC Guard and help the recruiters by supporting events and taking every opportunity to speak to the public about our noble mission.

We are engaging the community through youth programs such as Youth Challenge, a community-based program for 16- to 18- year old youth that leads, trains and mentors at-risk youth. About Face is a no hassle program that gives youth a structured, informative after-school and summer environment and STARBASE is a

program for youth ages 6 to 18 aimed at improving math and science skills.

We also participate in the NGB-sponsored State Partnership Program (SPP) with Jamaica. This partnership supports national security objectives in the region through sharing techniques, procedures, and information regarding subjects of common interest such as Narco-terrorism and counter-drug efforts.

Last week the Joint Headquarters Steering Group met for two days to further the goals and objectives of our command. We are committed to expanding education benefits for our members.

To all Guard members today, you keep the faith of all those who have served, and I urge you to maintain a high state of readiness, physical fitness, technical competence, and family preparedness. Keep the tradition going strong as Guardsmen—Ready, Reliable, Essential, Accessible.

DC Guard Members Enjoy a Feast for Sharing

Story by Staff Sgt. Lorenzo Parnell

Washington — The aroma of a great feast flowed across the room as patrons prepared to enjoy the hot meal being served by volunteers from the DC National Guard. The Guardsmen and their family members joined in the annual Feast for Sharing meal sponsored by The Salvation Army and Safeway Supermarket.

“This is an annual event which normally serves on average 4,000 to 5,000 people. This year because of weather conditions numbers are slightly lower we will serve around 3,500 people,” said Maj. Todd Smith of the Salvation Army.

WPGC 95.5’s Shaq in the Pack and Justine Love were on hand to show their support to DC residents. Speakers included Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, who gave an inspirational message on how the community of Dc always comes through to help the needy, and Councilman Jim Graham, Ward 1, who spoke words of encouragement to the residents and personally thanked all the volunteers for their support.

“The Salvation Army invites 18,000 to participate in being served the free meal. The invitees include homeless shelters, nursing homes, welfare recipients and other social service agencies,” said Smith.



Senior Master Sgt. Leica Purham, of the D.C Air National Guard finance office, serves residents at the table assigned to group. “I enjoy giving to the community and it’s always a pleasure to serve,” said Purham.

Jamaican Defense Force Chaplain Exchange

Story and photos by

Staff Sergeant Lorenzo Parnell

Kingston, Jamaica — In the beginning, the DC National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) with Jamaica had its growing pains. After several years, it has reached full stride and is off to a great start in 2005.

In early February the SPP sponsored a Chaplain Exchange Visit to Jamaica to see what the D.C. National Guard can do to assist the Jamaica Defense Forces (JDF) chaplain program. Additionally, it provided a service, helping to minister to the military community and their families. The Jamaica Defense Force (JDF) has only one Chaplain for the entire force of four thousand soldiers. Maj. Sirrano A. Kitson is the JDF Chaplain but has many other additional duties.

“My mission is to provide personal care and religious education for officer and enlisted men and women of the force,” said Kitson. “I also have additional duties as education officer, force welfare office, and military enlisted officer,” he said.

Kitson is highly respected by all ranks, from private to chief of staff, according to Maj. Andrea M. Foster, Deputy State Chaplain, DC Army National Guard. While there are differences in what the JDF chaplain can and can't do, missions are the same. One primary difference is that Jamaica is primarily a Christian nation and Chaplain



Chaplain Siranno Kitson, Chaplain Andrea Foster, Jamaican Defense Force Chief of Staff Rear Admiral Hardley Lewin and Chaplain Stuart Kenworthy take a moment to share an Ash Wednesday service.

Kitson can speak freely about Jesus Christ and quote scriptures in his sermons.

“As United States chaplains, we would have to gauge our audience,” said Foster. “As a female chaplain visiting this country, everything is new for the JDF members - it's rare for them to see. This adds a different qualifier to me as a chaplain and it's a plus,” she said.

The partnership has grown into a bond between the chaplains. Kitson likes the team chaplain approach and having a female brings a different aspect as well. Kitson handles many tasks, the SPP program offers

assistance. He said one benefit of the chaplain exchange is that the JDF can recognize the need of a reserve chaplain component and hopefully help provide that support.

“We are pleased to be in your country,” said Maj. Stuart Kenworthy, Chaplain for the 372nd Military Police Company. “We have been very busy in the D.C. National Guard and have had 17 deployments. Everyone here should be proud just for being here because you were selected over thousands of applicants to join the JDF,” said Kenworthy as he addressed the soldiers at the range. Kenworthy said as a high tempo military police chaplain, being on the range he feels right at home.



Chaplain (Maj.) Sirrano Kitson (c) explains the significance of the candle and symbolic bowl to the visiting clergy.

Andrews Air Force Base Springs into Action for Aviation Career Day

Story by Staff Sgt. Lorenzo Parnell

Andrews Air Force Base - Even the rain could not dampen the spirits of the crowd gathered for Aviation Career Day here April 22. According to Senior Master Sgt. Barbara Brown, Recruiting and Retention Supervisor for Joint Force Headquarters, District of Columbia, who has coordinated this event the last 5 years, this was the very first time it has rained. She was a little skeptical about the turnout.

"Aviation Career Day is for the kids and their future. We want to let them know what is available for them in the aviation career field. It doesn't have to be military aviation; it can be civilian as well," Brown said.

However, the turnout was great. The spirit, enthusiasm and pride along with the outstanding support of the unit personnel and the participants made the event a success.

Over 175 students from 20 high schools were on site eager to learn about aviation, and awaiting the announcement of the Drill Competition in which 11 high schools participated.

The big draw to the event has always been the drill team competition between the High Schools attending aviation career day. This year the competition was stiff. First place honors went to Surratsville High School of Clinton, MD, second place went to Eastern High School of Washington, DC and third place went to Washington Math and Science High School.

Evaluating the drill teams' performances were members of the Honor Guard and the 231st Combat Communications Squadron. Staff Sgt. Deriek Taft and Technical Sgt. Fuller Dodson worked closely on evaluating the precision movements of the teams and command and control of the drill teams by their commanders.



Chief Master Sgt. Clayton Dade, DC Air National Guard (right) explains the F-16 simulator to Aaron Hope (in cockpit) and his twin brother Brandon of Hayfield Secondary School in Clinton, Md.

"Surratsville was the 1st place winner because of their overall appearance, their steps were together and they seemed more prepared than the other teams," said Taft.

Students from the Annapolis High School Air Force Junior ROTC found out about aviation career day through their course instructor. Others found out through friends who are already in the program and have participated in this event in previous years.

"I like being here because we get to see fighter planes and military equipment we wouldn't ordinarily see in school," said Annapolis High School student Jake Hubbard.

Rachel Donoho and Julianne Collins both say that they always wanted to be in the aviation careers field; this gives them an opportunity to see what aviation careers have to offer.

Staff Sgt. Taft echoes their thoughts. "Aviation Career day overall gives the 14-17 year old student exposure to the military and when the students start to make choices for their careers it gives them options for the future," he said.

Staff Sgt. Amanda Potts, a volunteer from the 231st Combat Communications Squadron, says after several years of trying to get the National Aeronautics & Space Administration (NASA) education tour bus to show they were finally able to make it. The bus showed students some of the many career paths available at NASA.

"We tried to get NASA to support this event for the last three years and they are finally here," said Potts. "I'm here assisting Senior Master Sgt. Brown in coordination of events, staffing, and basically ensuring everything runs smoothly," Potts said.

There were 13 vendors supporting the Aviation Career Day. This event was sponsored by DC Air National Guard and co-sponsored by the East Coast Chapter Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.

The event featured Army National Guard, U.S. Air Force and Air Force Reserve, Coast Guard, and a host of colleges to include Emory Riddle Aeronautical University and Webster University.

"We provide scholarships to the students and we encourage them to never give up," said Col. Taro Jones, President of the East Coast Chapter Tuskegee Airmen. "We have always been part of Aviation Career Day and will continue to support it in the future," said Jones.

Operation Northern Thunder

Photos by Staff Sgt Lorenzo Lorenzo Parnell



Left - Green smoke sizzles into the air and provide a signal to the fire team to initiate a rescue mission. The scenario was conducted during phase three of the training, held in Alpina, Michigan....



Left - Staff Sgt. James Anderson, 113th SFS, takes a break after his duties as an aggressor. His mission was simple - stop the fire team for accomplishing their mission.



Above - Maj. Charles Moose (right), 113th Security Forces commander briefs Maj. Gen. David F. Wherley Jr., Commanding General DC National Guard on training mission overall objectives.



Above - This soldier prepares to lay a base of cover fire in support of his fire team conducting an exercise-training mission.

Left - Senior Master Sgt. Jim Thomas of the 183rd Provost Marshal Office gives a base explanation of his goals for this training. "The purpose of this training is to prepare security forces members to deploy at any given moment," said Thomas. as Maj. Gen Wherley listens attentively.

Guard waves flag for baseball in the district

Story and photo by Dennis Ryan

Pentagram staff writer

Washington - The area around Robert F. Kennedy Stadium took on all the trappings of a major league opening day April 14, even if it was a night game. Vendors were out early selling their wares in front of D.C. Armory.

Maintenance people busily ran about making last minute preparations to the field and the stadium. The frantic activity could be excused; after all it has been 34 years since Washington had a major league baseball team.

Local military people had a major part in the proceedings. Around 160 D.C. National Guard and Air National Guardsmen gathered at the armory at noon to prepare for their roles. The guardsmen had a short walk across the street to the stadium to practice unrolling a huge American flag for the pre-game festivities, which included a fellow by the name of George W. Bush throwing out the first ball.

Doug Green, of Sky's the Limit Productions, explained to the guardsmen early in the afternoon the intricacies of unraveling a flag the size of the outfield. The Soldiers and Airmen would be divided into holders, pullers and side persons.

One group would remain stationary and hold the flag, while another segment ran with the flag across the outfield with the remaining troops grasping the sides of the flag as it was pulled past them.

The producer, Green, knew when to allow a military person to translate his orders. 1st Sgt. Lonnie Bryant loudly gave directions to the guardsmen during practice,

"He knows how to bark," Green said with a smile on his face.

The first sergeant is old enough to remember baseball in Washington.

"I do what I got to do," Bryant said. "They gave me this mission. It's got to be done. My dad used to bring

me when the Senators were playing here. My job is to take care of the Soldier. Make sure they get fed and they get water. They are very excited."

Chap. (Maj.) Stuart Kenworthy served as a holder for the flag ceremony.

"This is a dream to see major league baseball back in Washington and you can feel the excitement rippling through the city," the chaplain said. "And you can see the troops are excited too."

Sgt. 1st Class Pierre Ligonde was particularly thrilled to be able to chase baseballs and autographs during

batting practice. A few troops were allowed to stand in the mouth of the center field gate while the Nationals took some practice swings. Between the homeruns and the balls allowed by the Nats fielders to roll through the gate, the troops acquired a pretty nice collection of souvenirs.

"I'm having a great time today, to be part of this historical moment," Ligonde a member of 547th Transportation unit said.

"Next to coming back from Iraq, this is the greatest," he said.

Tech. Sgt. Irma Tamayo-McMurphy of the Air National Guard enjoyed being on the field. "It's a great place," she said. "It's a privilege. It gives you an adrenaline rush. It's a good break from work. We're having an exercise."

Shortly before the ceremonial first pitch, the Guardsmen walked onto the field

carrying the flag like a huge snake and the fans erupted into a deafening roar. The fans all stood as the anthem was sung and the flag unfurled. Four F-16s from the D.C. Guard's 121st Fighter Squadron streaked overhead and fireworks erupted. The Soldiers and Airmen then hustled to roll the flag back up and they walked off the field to a thunderous applause from the 45,596 fans. The president then threw a high hard pitch from the mound and baseball was officially back in the nation's capital. The home team pulled out a 5-3 victory in the home opener, but the result did not matter all that much. There was joy in Washington because major league baseball was back.



Arizona Diamondback pitcher Javier Vasquez watches D. C. National Guardsmen unfurl a giant American flag.